

January 19, 2006

The Hon. John Andrist
State Senator
PO Box E
Crosby, ND 58730

Dear Senator Andrist:

Your recent article, "Keeping Open Minds for Constructive Change" in the Divide County Journal prompted a number of phone calls and emails to my office from concerned staff at the ND School for the Deaf in Devils Lake and ND Vision Services in Grand Forks, as well as community members and advocates for deaf/blind services.

First let me say that I agree with you – there is a need for more serious examination of how the state of North Dakota delivers constitutional and state law requirements to provide a uniform system of education to the populations with special needs, especially in the areas of the deaf and the blind.

My office has directed multiple studies of both institutions since they were transferred to me in 1991. At the time of transfer, the ND School for the Blind (NDSB) still functioned as a residential school. In response to a study commissioned by my office and presented to the legislature, in 1994 NDSB was transformed from a residential school to an outreach facility. Again through legislative action, NDSB's role was expanded to include adult services and in 2001 its name changed to ND Division of Vision Services/School for the Blind.

You are also right in your assertion that "protecting jobs and community economics" plays a big part in change. I can attest, first hand, that the transition in Grand Forks was painful. However, I believe that today's outreach model is one in which the state can be proud and has been noticed nation-wide as a positive action for all concerned. Carmen Suminski, Superintendent for the Division of Vision Services has also responded to you, under separate cover, to provide you with additional information about the history of the Grand Forks institution.

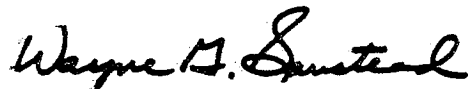
Declining enrollment at the ND School for the Deaf has not gone unnoticed by my office. I commissioned three studies to help me administer the school according to law. The first study was conducted by an independent CPA, Richard Foster; an organizational study and a follow up study was concluded in 2003 by Roger Worner, an educational consultant who has assisted many ND school districts with reorganization plans. That same year I formed a Blue Ribbon Task Force in Devils Lake. The task force consisted

Senator Andrist
Page 2
January 19, 2006

of community members, school staff, the Superintendent of the Devils Lake School District, statewide service providers, and area legislators. The mission of the Task Force was to achieve consensus on how to provide legislatively or constitutionally mandated services in a cost effective manner to the students. The school is in the process of adopting many of the improvements identified in the studies, including mainstreaming students into the Devils Lake School System. Expanding the role of NDSD to include the provision of adult services required legislative approval and the proposal was submitted and approved by the legislative assembly in HB 1231. Although no action was taken in 2005, a proposed study resolution was passed in our appropriation's bill. However, it was not one of the study resolutions adopted by the legislative council.

My staff and I welcome your interest in making the school viable. We are very interested in visiting with you about our findings and recommendations – which include expanding services to hard-of-hearing adults and increasing outreach services. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Wayne G. Sanstead". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Wayne" being more prominent.

Dr. Wayne G. Sanstead
State Superintendent

cc: North Dakota Legislative Council
Budget Committee on Health Care
Senator Aaron Krauter, Chairman